Welge, Jobst. *Genealogical Fictions. Cultural Periphery and Historical Change in the Modern Novel.* Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1-4214-1435-5.

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The critical expansiveness of literature brought on by the advent of Cultural and Post-colonial Studies in the 1960s has amplified, complicated, and enriched the discourse, and nowhere is this more evident than in Jobst Welge's new book *Genealogical Fictions*. The entire book is an exercise to implode the near ossified binaries clinging like carbuncles to the study of the Realist Novel of the 19th and 20th centuries. Welge's study of the genealogical realist novel is simultaneously transatlantic, comprehensive of both the 19th and the 20th centuries, and spans Italian, Scottish, Irish, Portuguese, Brazilian, and Spanish novels. The common thread throughout the chapters is the theme of genealogical decline in realist and naturalist novels as a way to problematize nationalization and modernization from different peripheries (internal peripheries, in relation to Europe's centers of modernization, and in relation to the experience of time).

Welge's selection of the peripheral or liminal borderlands of the realist novel is precise and offers intriguing new readings of the novels studied. He justifies his focus on the periphery, and the trope of genealogical decline as it manifests there, as a literary space that focuses on difference, variation and compromise in the light of progress, modernization and nationalization. The contemporary relevance of this is phrased concisely; "I would argue that the 'peripheral' novels here discussed anticipate not only our current concern with processes of globalization but also our present sense that the 'homogenizing force of modernity' is an illusion that has faded in the light of a 'plurality of paths toward modernization' and a plurality of temporal worlds" (9). Indeed, Welge's diverse demonstration of this liminal modernizing space via the trope of genealogical decline provides powerful strategies of great relevance to the globalizing contact zones of his reader in 2015. The author's analysis of the plurality of paths towards (or away) from modernization in novels of the 19th and 20th centuries prefigures the very dynamic of the present day.

The peripheral genealogical novel is polivalent and dynamic. The first novel in Welge's study is Walter Scott's *Waverly*, which represents the assimilation of Great Britain's other culture, the Scottish Highlands, by means of a representation of

generational change in one family. Scott's Romantic depiction of the Highlanders ultimately serves the purpose of bringing them into the fold of British modernity.

This is contrasted by other novels studied by Welge, wherein the genealogical crisis is exploited to resist, reduce, or diminish assimilation to an inevitable modernizing center; such is the case of his study of *I Maloviglia* by Sicilian author Giovanni Verga. Whereas the story of Scott's *Waverly* utilizes the family trope as a metaphor of Britain's absorption of the Scottish periphery, Verga focuses on family as a reservoir of metaphysical changelessness, resistant to the surface changes of modernization. In the face of industrialization and capitalism rampant in Northern Italy, the family structure of Italy, and Europe's, periphery reveals fundamental and changeless truths.

These are but two examples of Welge's critical accomplishment. The genealogical crisis suffered by families is depicted in other peripheral countries, such as Spain (Galdos' *Fortunata y Jacinta* and Pardo Bazán's *Los pazos de Ulloa* and *La madre naturaleza*), Portugal (de Queirós' *Os Maias*), Brazil (Machado de Assis' *Esau e Jacó* and José Lins de Rego's *Plantation Boy*), all the way to Modernist novels such as Di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo*. Each of these novels belongs to a specific national, economic and cultural context that configures the genealogical trope uniquely, adopting or critiquing modernity and its temporal revolution or, more frequently as the 19th century wanes, engaging this paradigm shift with ambivalence and irony.

Welge's book adopts a truly comparative approach, which is its greatest virtue and its greatest challenge. Welge's prose and rigorous research accomplish a consistency and soundness to his study that makes for pleasureable and convincing reading. Welge summarizes plots and character studies succintly and sews their relevance into his overall argument. Welge's expertise and fluency in narrative theory is complete, but at no place in the book does his knowledge of narratology overwhelm the central genealogical theme of the book. His references to key concepts of Genet, Moretti, and other critics is always deftly employed to explain and deepen the significance of the genealogical aspect under discussion, contributing to the readability and coherence of the text.

Even with Welge's smooth transitions and pothole filling, I did find that perhaps the greatest limitation of the book will be found in the reader's difficulty accessing its bevy of texts. The very breadth of the study, the sheer number and diversity of novels under analysis, create a special challenge for its readability, comprehension and critical consumption. Welge's analysis is rigorously maintained with admirable clarity, but even the trained critic will likely leap to the few chapters that study novels with which they are familiar. This is due in part, no doubt, to the hyper-specialization of the academic field, and our own myopia and ownership of very small corners of the literary market; nonetheless, the quality of the book deflates in part due to this conflict and restricts its usefulness, in places, to reference material and encyclopedic storehouse. The number of people to fully enjoy and appreciate the depth and breadth of Welge's admirable study will likely be a select number of an already select readership.

Yet this critique carries with it another critique of our profession, one which Welge addresses in his introduction. He writes "I bring together texts that are normally discussed only *within* the bounds of their respective national contexts and disciplines. I see the task of comparative literature as establishing and making visible the links between national and international, global frames of reference" (11). In this respect, Welge accomplishes the task of the comparative critic. This addresses another strength of the book. It discards and renders irrelevant many burdensome dichotomies that clutter the study and discussion of the literature of modernity: center/periphery, capital/region, North/South, European/Oriental. Welge penetrates into these often polarizing dichotomies and deflates them, exposing the complex interchanges and hybridities occurring ambivalently between the dialogical poles. The multiple fault lines on which these peripheries fall create a dynamic of cultural adaptation, a plurality of temporalities, inherent to the fact that all of these novels deal directly with "moments of crisis, transition, and sociohistorical change" (11). The engagement of the binaries on the liminal space of the periphery is the key to Welge's study, and the universal presence of the genealogy trope, of family continuity or extinction, is the key element to its understanding.

This book is relevant to the student of the realist novel, specialists in post-colonial and cultural studies, as well as more traditional scholars of the novels listed above. The study is of special interest as well to the sociohistorical reader of literature, and the contextualization of 19th and 20th century literature in the transformative revolution of modernization will find deep and precise readings here. The broader, comparative study provides new readings of old novels, and builds bridges between literary fields that have been floating outside each other's' orbits.